

Testing testing: Embedding professional accreditation to enhance employability within creative disciplines - Conference Paper

Monkhouse, J.

Author post-print (accepted) deposited in CURVE March 2016

Original citation & hyperlink:

Monkhouse, J. (2016) 'Testing testing: Embedding professional accreditation to enhance employability within creative disciplines - Conference Paper', 'Inspire – sharing great practice in Arts and Humanities teaching and learning'. Held 3-4 March 2016 at Brighton, UK.
<https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/events-conferences/event/inspire-%E2%80%93-sharing-great-practice-arts-and-humanities-teaching-and-learning>

Copyright © and Moral Rights are retained by the author(s) and/ or other copyright owners. A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge. This item cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder(s). The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

This document is the author's post-print version, incorporating any revisions agreed during the peer-review process. Some differences between the published version and this version may remain and you are advised to consult the published version if you wish to cite from it.

Testing Testing – embedding professional accreditation to enhance employability within creative disciplines

Joy Monkhouse, Coventry University

Background

Coventry University developed a key strand around employability seeking to mitigate the impact of the harsh economy on graduates.

*“ Recent graduates, described in the press as ‘Generation Crunch’ have found it more difficult than ever to gain traditional graduate jobs.
(www.universitiesUK.ac.uk, 2011) ”*

The School of Art & Design had to address employability across a range of creative disciplines, with the additional challenge of how to formally recognize the industry standard skills required by creative industries.

Aims and objectives

This case-study looks at a teaching intervention put into practice over 4 years (2012-2016), which embedded professional accreditation. This paper looks at the rationale and results of the accreditation scheme and discusses the use of formal tests in order to enhance student employability within creative disciplines.

Another key aim is to share findings about the students perception of the assessment method and how their confidence and trust in non-traditional forms of assessment were managed.

The new employability strand offered the opportunity for the development of a suite of modules which aimed to:

- Offer professional accreditation and improve recognition of work skills and competencies
- Expand the range of modules offered to improve relevance and flexibility
- Enhance student employability and enterprise

Methodology and Approach

Initial research via interviews with employers, careers advisors and alumni, along with reviews of job descriptions from a range of creative industries, revealed the growing demand for key skills and competencies which were increasingly being specified as essential. Potential employers voiced a need for graduates who could quickly demonstrate the required level of knowledge and proficiency.

The Teaching & Learning strategy was reviewed with the aim of embedding an industry recognized accreditation scheme using Adobe Certified Associate (ACA).

Careful 'constructive alignment' (Biggs, 2003) was required to map the Learning outcomes with the ACA scheme to align the teaching & learning activities with the new assessment method. A suite of modules were developed ensuring that the Learning outcomes could be achieved and assessed via a 10 week module with a formal online summative examination at the end.

Key Tools and Technology

- Industry standard software (Adobe CC)
- A pool of part-time lecturers who are also practicing within a range of industries including; Film-making, Marketing, Graphic Design, Publishing, Web-design, Illustration and Photography
- Moodle support resources; links to tutorials, exam preparation materials and quizzes.
- Adobe online exam portal (Certiport)

Put it to the test! A leap of faith...

Traditionally art & design students were most commonly assessed via presentation, portfolio and dissertation.

Formal tests were a bit of a culture shock for art & design students who may not have sat tests since 'A levels', however graduates are increasingly being tested as part of the recruitment process.

Students are often put on the spot with recruitment panels and timed tasks which test their understanding of not only which buttons to press, but when and why. They need to prove a level of competency, along

with a profile which can be judged quickly, which is accredited both academically and professionally.

Can students deliver what it says on their C.V.?

Can they do what it says on the tin?

Students were given the opportunity to evidence a level of proficiency with the required software. The Adobe Certified Associate (ACA) scheme is an industry entry-level accreditation. The test is in the form of an online formal invigilated exam. The scheme sets a benchmark for levels of proficiency with the specified software, and also covers industry best practice with a wider understanding of it's use within a commercial context.

Early Feedback and Findings

Early feedback from questionnaires and interviews with both students and staff suggested a negative view of tests – that they encourage a surface approach, or learning by rote, which may mean a lack of engagement.

Deep and Surface Learning

Traditional methods of teaching & learning 'pushes the students toward superficial levels of engagement with material' (Marton and Saljo, 1976). Previous research around the theory of 'Deep and Surface' learning shows that qualitative questioning of students, including the **how** and **why**, as well as the **what?** demonstrate a deeper understanding.

The same student may take a deep approach for instance, in learning the underlying design principal applied to a question, whereas a surface approach may come in to play when simply relaying appropriate resizing dimensions, where just memorizing the facts produces an equally successful result.

The tests simulate a real world creative problem-solving challenge. In fact, findings suggest that this method of assessment appears to suit the creative disciplines.

Learning by Doing

The 'Learning by doing' approach (Gibbs, 1988) is embedded through a reflective learning cycle which links theory and practice. By engaging in a cycle of activities via a series of lessons linked to practice tests, the

students move forward by looking back and reviewing their own performance.

A balance of practice and performance tasks, mixed with situational judgement questions, test a student's resolve in a similar way to those competency tests and recruitment processes now commonly used by employers.

Evaluation and Results

The introduction of formal accredited examination has been evaluated via questionnaires both at the beginning, and at the end of module, following final tests. The ACA test scores have been measured from each cohort, along with the pass rate (40%) and the accreditation benchmark (70%).

(See Appendix 1. ACA test scores for Photoshop 2013-14 example).

The overall average test scores were also monitored and these were compared across each academic year of the case-study. General student satisfaction was also evaluated each year.

In the first year of this case-study, only 20% of students were confident that they might achieve the desired benchmark at the start of the module, however the pass rate was in fact 91.5% and 26% achieved the ACA benchmark and gained accreditation (Adobe Certified Associate).

By the fourth year of the case-study, over 50% of students were confident in their ability to achieve the desired benchmark, and the pass rate so far is 95% with just under 40% having attained ACA accreditation. *(See Appendix 2. Statistics for ACA test scores 2012- 2016).*

Analysis of Stats:

- *A total of 700 students across 14 Adobe modules covering stages 1-3.*
- **2012-13** *Av 91.5% pass rate across stages 1-3, with just over a quarter achieving ACA accreditation.*
- **2013-14** *Av 93.5% pass rate across stages 1-3, with just under a third achieving ACA accreditation.*
- **2014-15** *Av 94% pass rate across stages 1-3, with just over a third achieving ACA accreditation.*
- **2015-16** *Av 95% pass rate across stages 1-3, so far just under 40 % achieving ACA accreditation.*

Evaluation of surveys and Student satisfaction:

- *Student module questionnaires – Averaged 94% positive feedback overall. (See Appendix 3. Module evaluation survey example).*
- *The module evaluation surveys showed a high level of student satisfaction and an increase in demand from students to expand the scheme. Developmental feedback suggests a demand for further expansion of the scheme, with more flexibility and access to software.*
- *Coventry University achieved 2nd place ranking for Careers after 6 months, in both Art & Design and Media in 2013 (Guardian League Tables June 2013) and this intervention was just one amongst a whole raft of initiatives which assisted in positive destinations reaching 96% overall in 2014 (DLHE survey 2014).*

Feedback from students

Feedback from students indicates an improved confidence and trust in the assessment tests and the proficiency levels benchmarked by the Adobe accredited exams. Interviews with students during each year of this case-study revealed that they gained a wider understanding of creative industry standards and best practice, and that this has boosted confidence in their ability to demonstrate key competencies to potential employers.

The intrinsic terminology which is native to each trade and discipline may seem impenetrable to outsiders at first, akin to entering a new tribe with a new language – ‘Tribes and territories’ (Trowler, 1995). However, gradual exposure to terminology in context when using specific software and industry terms, builds an awareness of tools and techniques which are consolidated by application and practice.

Module end interviews with students have shown very positive attitudes towards the tests – many of them continue to study for another software certification. Some students have commented that being Adobe accredited had led directly to a work-placement or a position as a result of discussing it at interview.

“This will help me get through my degree – I’ve just got a part-time studio job after telling them about my Adobe certificate.”
(1st year Photography student).

“I had 2 tests to complete and 2 rounds of interviews to get the job, but I had already done Adobe tests so handled it quite well I think.”
(Graphic Design graduate 2015)

Review

This case-study illustrates how students perception of assessment methods altered and how their confidence and trust in non-traditional forms of assessment changed as a result of the teaching intervention.

By managing students expectations and facilitating a pattern of formative feedback and practice tests, the students build a confidence in their abilities and have moved from a position of being nervous of these tests, to a strong position of positive results, with high student satisfaction and improved confidence in presenting themselves professionally to secure their chosen career pathway.

The challenge now:

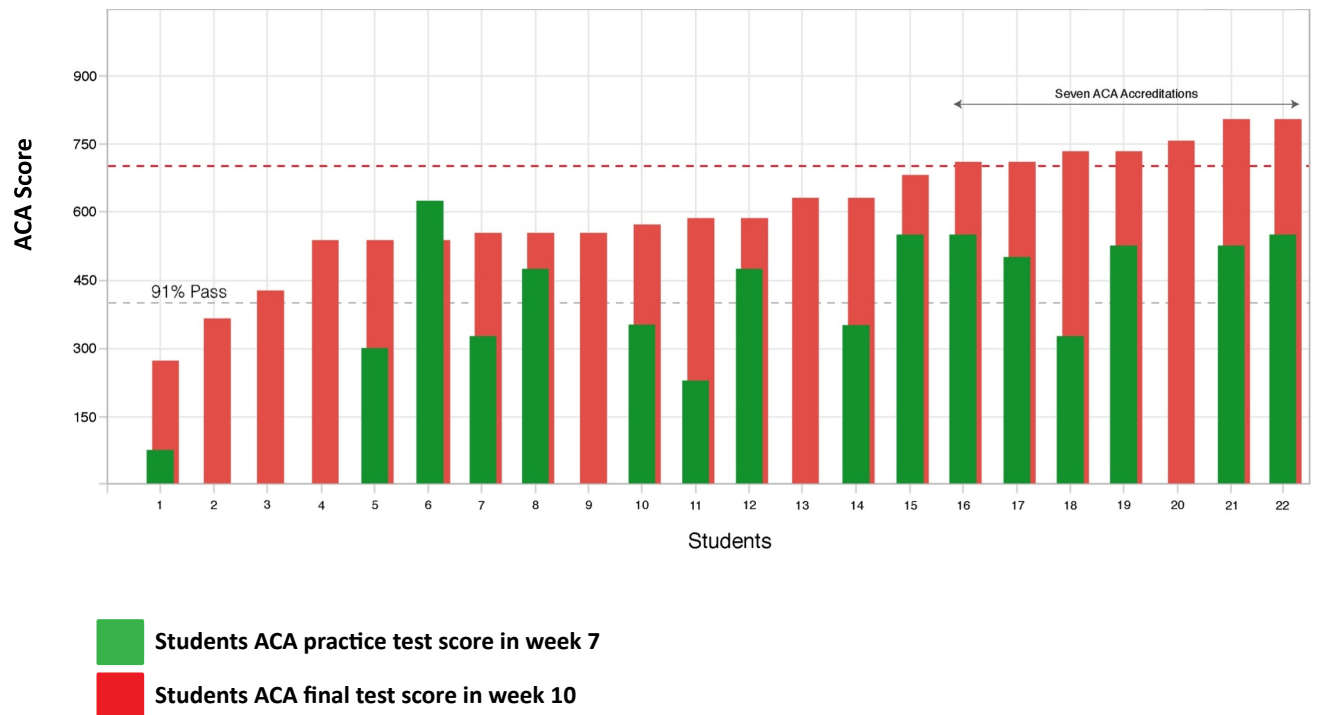
- To realise the full potential of industry accredited benchmarking within creative disciplines, and where it can be appropriately applied. Build knowledge and credibility around accreditation schemes.
- Continue research and understanding around how this form of assessment is perceived across a range of industries, both from a students and employers perspective.
- Continue research and understanding of Pedagogy for employability 'How can we best integrate and balance different ways of teaching and learning that promote both effective learning and employability for students? (HEA Pedagogy for employability, 2012)

References

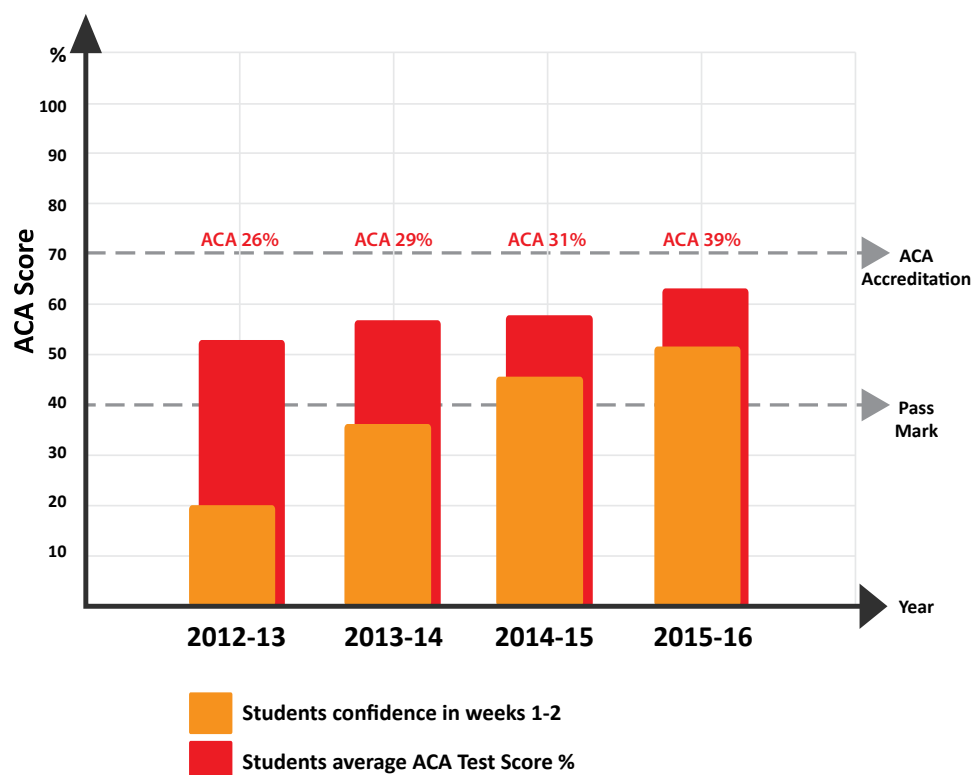
- Biggs, J. (2003) *Aligning teaching and assessment to curriculum objectives*. Imaginative Curriculum Project, LTSN Generic Centre
- Biggs, J. (1993). *What do inventories of students' learning processes really measure? A theoretical review and clarification*. British Journal of Educational Psychology, 63, 3-19. [Defines "achievement orientation"]
- Entwistle, N. & Ramsden, P. (1983). *Understanding student learning*. London: Croom Helm.
- Gibbs, G (1988) *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods*, FEU
- HESA (2013) and HESA (2014) *Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Survey*, DLHE [online] available from <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/>
- HEA Pegg, A., Waldock, J., Hendy-Isaak, S., Lawton, R., (2012) *Pedagogy for employability*, updated edition, HEA
- Marton, F., Hounsell, D. & Entwistle, N. (1984) *The experience of learning*. Edinburgh. Scottish Academic Press.
- Price, L. (2011). "Modelling factors for predicting student learning outcomes in higher education." [Available online] http://oro.open.ac.uk/32494/1/Modeling_factors_Linda_Price.pdf
- Universities Scotland 'Getting Ready for Work' *Employability and Higher Education*. [online] <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk>
- Yorke, M. & Knight, P. (2004) 'Embedding Employability in the Curriculum' – *Learning and Teaching Support Network and ESECT*

Appendices

Appendix 1 *ACA Test Scores - Adobe Photoshop 2013-14*



Appendix 2 *Statistics for ACA test scores 2012-16*



Condensed Item Analysis Report

A206AD

Staff teaching on this module are good at explaining things clearly

Response	Frequency	Percent	
Definitely Agree	10	66.67	<div style="width: 66.67%;"></div>
Mostly Agree	3	20.00	<div style="width: 20.00%;"></div>
Neither	2	13.33	<div style="width: 13.33%;"></div>
Disagree or Agree			
Mostly Disagree	0	0.00	<div style="width: 0.00%;"></div>
Definitely Disagree	0	0.00	<div style="width: 0.00%;"></div>
Not Applicable 0			

Staff teaching on this module make the subject interesting

Response	Frequency	Percent	
Definitely Agree	8	53.33	<div style="width: 53.33%;"></div>
Mostly Agree	4	26.67	<div style="width: 26.67%;"></div>
Neither	3	20.00	<div style="width: 20.00%;"></div>
Disagree or Agree			
Mostly Disagree	0	0.00	<div style="width: 0.00%;"></div>
Definitely Disagree	0	0.00	<div style="width: 0.00%;"></div>
Not Applicable 0			

Staff teaching on this module are enthusiastic about what they are teaching

Response	Frequency	Percent	
Definitely Agree	10	66.67	<div style="width: 66.67%;"></div>
Mostly Agree	3	20.00	<div style="width: 20.00%;"></div>
Neither	2	13.33	<div style="width: 13.33%;"></div>
Disagree or Agree			
Mostly Disagree	0	0.00	<div style="width: 0.00%;"></div>
Definitely Disagree	0	0.00	<div style="width: 0.00%;"></div>
Not Applicable 0			

The module is intellectually stimulating and engaging

Response	Frequency	Percent	
Definitely Agree	7	46.67	<div style="width: 46.67%;"></div>
Mostly Agree	5	33.33	<div style="width: 33.33%;"></div>
Neither	3	20.00	<div style="width: 20.00%;"></div>
Disagree or Agree			
Mostly Disagree	0	0.00	<div style="width: 0.00%;"></div>
Definitely Disagree	0	0.00	<div style="width: 0.00%;"></div>
Not Applicable 0			

The materials used by the staff have enhanced my learning

Response	Frequency	Percent	
Definitely Agree	7	46.67	<div style="width: 46.67%;"></div>
Mostly Agree	6	40.00	<div style="width: 40.00%;"></div>
Neither	2	13.33	<div style="width: 13.33%;"></div>
Disagree or Agree			
Mostly Disagree	0	0.00	<div style="width: 0.00%;"></div>
Definitely Disagree	0	0.00	<div style="width: 0.00%;"></div>
Not Applicable 0			

Module information (module guide, timetable and assessment requirements) is available on CUOnline

Response	Frequency	Percent	
Definitely Agree	11	73.33	<div style="width: 73.33%;"></div>
Mostly Agree	1	6.67	<div style="width: 6.67%;"></div>
Neither	3	20.00	<div style="width: 20.00%;"></div>
Disagree or Agree			
Mostly Disagree	0	0.00	<div style="width: 0.00%;"></div>
Definitely Disagree	0	0.00	<div style="width: 0.00%;"></div>
Not Applicable 0			

CUOnline is used effectively to support my learning

Response	Frequency	Percent	
Definitely Agree	10	66.67	
Mostly Agree	3	20.00	
Neither	2	13.33	
Disagree or Agree			
Mostly Disagree	0	0.00	
Definitely Disagree	0	0.00	
Not Applicable	0		

Staff teaching on this module are well prepared

Response	Frequency	Percent	
Definitely Agree	12	80.00	
Mostly Agree	1	6.67	
Neither	2	13.33	
Disagree or Agree			
Mostly Disagree	0	0.00	
Definitely Disagree	0	0.00	
Not Applicable	0		

Classes usually start and finish on time

Response	Frequency	Percent	
Definitely Agree	8	53.33	
Mostly Agree	4	26.67	
Neither	2	13.33	
Disagree or Agree			
Mostly Disagree	1	6.67	
Definitely Disagree	0	0.00	
Not Applicable	0		

The assessment requirements on this module are clear

Response	Frequency	Percent	
Definitely Agree	10	66.67	
Mostly Agree	3	20.00	
Neither	2	13.33	
Disagree or Agree			
Mostly Disagree	0	0.00	
Definitely Disagree	0	0.00	
Not Applicable	0		

Hand-in dates and coursework return dates are clearly defined

Response	Frequency	Percent	
Definitely Agree	7	50.00	
Mostly Agree	5	35.71	
Neither	2	14.29	
Disagree or Agree			
Mostly Disagree	0	0.00	
Definitely Disagree	0	0.00	
Not Applicable	1		

Feedback on any returned work has been useful to develop my understanding of the module content

Response	Frequency	Percent	
Definitely Agree	8	53.33	
Mostly Agree	4	26.67	
Neither	3	20.00	
Disagree or Agree			
Mostly Disagree	0	0.00	
Definitely Disagree	0	0.00	
Not Applicable	0		

Sufficient academic advice and support on this module are available

Response	Frequency	Percent	
Definitely Agree	9	60.00	
Mostly Agree	4	26.67	
Neither	2	13.33	
Disagree or Agree			
Mostly Disagree	0	0.00	
Definitely Disagree	0	0.00	
Not Applicable	0		

Staff teaching on this module are available when they say they will be

Response	Frequency	Percent	
Definitely Agree	10	66.67	
Mostly Agree	3	20.00	
Neither	2	13.33	
Disagree or Agree			
Mostly Disagree	0	0.00	
Definitely Disagree	0	0.00	
Not Applicable	0		

Appendix 3.3

The module timetable operates as expected and changes are communicated clearly in advance

Response	Frequency	Percent	
Definitely Agree	11	73.33	<div><div></div></div>
Mostly Agree	2	13.33	<div><div></div></div>
Neither	2	13.33	<div><div></div></div>
Disagree or Agree			
Mostly Disagree	0	0.00	<div><div></div></div>
Definitely Disagree	0	0.00	<div><div></div></div>
Not Applicable	0		

Library resources and services are sufficient for my needs on this module

Response	Frequency	Percent	
Definitely Agree	9	60.00	<div><div></div></div>
Mostly Agree	3	20.00	<div><div></div></div>
Neither	3	20.00	<div><div></div></div>
Disagree or Agree			
Mostly Disagree	0	0.00	<div><div></div></div>
Definitely Disagree	0	0.00	<div><div></div></div>
Not Applicable	0		

There is adequate access to specialist computer hardware and software required for this module

Response	Frequency	Percent	
Definitely Agree	11	73.33	<div><div></div></div>
Mostly Agree	2	13.33	<div><div></div></div>
Neither	2	13.33	<div><div></div></div>
Disagree or Agree			
Mostly Disagree	0	0.00	<div><div></div></div>
Definitely Disagree	0	0.00	<div><div></div></div>
Not Applicable	0		

There is adequate access to specialist equipment required for this module

Response	Frequency	Percent	
Definitely Agree	11	73.33	<div><div></div></div>
Mostly Agree	2	13.33	<div><div></div></div>
Neither	2	13.33	<div><div></div></div>
Disagree or Agree			
Mostly Disagree	0	0.00	<div><div></div></div>
Definitely Disagree	0	0.00	<div><div></div></div>
Not Applicable	0		

Overall the quality of this module is satisfactory

Response	Frequency	Percent	
Definitely Agree	9	60.00	<div><div></div></div>
Mostly Agree	4	26.67	<div><div></div></div>
Neither	2	13.33	<div><div></div></div>
Disagree or Agree			
Mostly Disagree	0	0.00	<div><div></div></div>
Definitely Disagree	0	0.00	<div><div></div></div>
Not Applicable	0		